

attempted suicide in the last 12 months. In 1997, the most recent year the question was asked, 8.8 percent of the high school students reported that they had attempted suicide in the past 12 months. The percentage reported in 1997 did not differ much from previous years. Other measures, such as the percentage seriously considering attempting suicide, could be used as alternate indicators. In 2001, 18.1 percent of high school students, and 20.8 percent of middle school students reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months. These indicators suggest that much needs to be done in order to move toward the Healthy People 2010 goals.

## Conclusion

The 1999 Surgeon General's Call To Action announced that "The nation must address suicide as a significant public health problem and put into place national strategies to prevent the loss of life and the suffering suicide causes."<sup>8</sup> He published 15 key recommendations, based on an approach that involves awareness, intervention, and methodology (AIM). AIM and its recommendations are designed to outline a course for suicide prevention now and serve as a foundation for the more comprehensive National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.<sup>30</sup>

In the five years 1997 through 2001, 4,563 North Carolina residents died by suicide and 19,717 North Carolina residents were hospitalized for self-inflicted injuries. Persons who were treated for self-inflicted injuries in emergency rooms or at their doctor's office were not included in these counts. Additionally, suicide was among the ten leading causes of death for persons ages 5-64, for males, and for whites in North Carolina during the time period studied. Suicide and self-injuring behavior is a widespread problem in our state.

Data on hospitalizations related to self-poisoning emphasize the relationship between psychological problems and self-injuring behavior. In North Carolina, mental-health-related drugs such as tranquilizers and other psychotropic drugs were used as the main substance for self-poisoning by persons age 25 and older.

The information gathered in this report emphasizes that suicide is a serious public health problem that needs to be addressed. Reducing the number of suicides and self-inflicted injuries requires:

- Raising the awareness of suicide, its risk factors, and possible signs.
- Developing screening and intervention programs in order to help prevent suicide deaths and hospitalizations due to self-inflicted injuries.
- Fostering research focusing on improving the identification of suicide risk factors as well as protective factors and appropriate interventions.
- Creating partnerships across the various agencies involved in caring for suicidal persons in order to combine knowledge, resources, and efforts.

## References

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